Shell Game

A scenario outline for the James Bond 007 roleplaying game by James Swallow

Shell Game was designed as an introductory scenario for players new to the 007 RPG but it can also be used for seasoned players who have recently been 'promoted' to a new skill level in an ongoing game. The original player group for **Shell Game** consisted of three player characters of Agent rank, newly promoted from Rookie level and awaiting their first field assignment; with some consideration of NPC skill levels the scenario could also accommodate a team of four newly-recruited Rookies or two recently promoted 00s.

The concept is a simple one; a group of SIS operatives are called into the Vauxhall Cross HQ of MI6 early one weekday morning with a 'rush job' to handle - a captured KGB agent is to be escorted from London to Edinburgh by the team, where a unit from the Finnish intelligence service SUPO will be waiting to pick him up, for eventual return to Moscow as part of an exchange. It's a seemingly simple enough exercise, but as you might expect, all is not as it seems.

The mission outline is as follows: Once they have been briefed, the team are issued with airline tickets, paperwork, their weapons (light pistols only) and a four-door car. The car has armour and bulletproof windows, along with a cellular phone link. It is important that the team NOT be given any nifty Q branch extras or communications gear - the mission is to proceed in strict radio silence. Pictures of their SUPO contacts and a code-phrase/countersign will be supplied.

The team is taken to the holding cells beneath the building where they are introduced to the bearded and bespectacled Ivan Kontarsky, their charge for the duration of the mission. Kontarsky is a KGB agent of 00 equivalent rank, and a tricky

customer. The PCs will find him to be charming yet deadly, and any female agents in the group will instantly become the targets of seduction attempts.

The PCs must drive from central London to the outlying Stanstead airport, where they will board a commuter jet to Edinburgh; once they reach Edinburgh airport, they will be met by the SUPO team, hand over Kontarsky and return to London on the next available flight.

However, what the PCs do not know is that is mission is actually a test of their skills, a 'graduation exam' of sorts. Kontarsky is actually an SIS agent playing the role of a KGB spy, and the SUPO team are all in on the deception - this kind of operation is a regular occurrence, and SIS and SUPO co-operate in testing their agents with it. The SIS agent will be grading the PCs as the mission progresses, for a final evaluation back at Vauxhall Cross. In addition, the PCs have been issued with special frangible ammunition in their weapons that disintegrates when it hits a hard target, causing vastly reduced damage. Treat all weapon damage as Damage Class A. The reduced rounds are indistinguishable from normal bullets - only firing them at a hard target and observing the effect will show the difference.

The secret test begins with something simple; a pair of motorcycles tail the PC car from Vauxhall through the city, and they must first spot them, then lose them in the morning rush hour traffic; the briefing will have stressed the need for discretion and stealth, so the PCs must not be too wild in their technique. The bikers are, once more, SIS agents masquerading as KGB operatives, and if caught, they should be turned over to HQ.

Next, on the motorway out of London toward Stanstead, a black car will follow them, while Kontarsky begins to complain of stomach cramps and demands that the driver pull over into a roadside cafe. It's an obvious ploy, but the PCs should be encouraged to play along. The black car contains a group of SIS operatives in KGB disguise of equal rank and number to the PCs, and they will attempt to capture Kontarsky and take him away in their vehicle. If they succeed, the PCs can give chase and recover him, but they should attempt to neutralise the attackers at the cafe location.

Arriving at Stanstead, the group have half an hour before the Edinburgh flight leaves; a moment arises where Kontarsky is alone with one or two of the PCs (if there is a larger group) in the boarding lounge - suddenly the KGB agent's entire body language will change radically. He will address the players in a cool British accent, all trace of his Russian manner gone and inform them that a situation has developed. The test is over, he says. Something more important is going on.

Here's where it starts to get fun; it is essential that from this point the scenario runs at a very quick pace, to punch up the excitement level and keep the PCs a little off-balance. Kontarsky breaks cover and gives the PCs his SIS codename - Predator. The agent acting as the dummy in this particular test is none other than 007 himself, James Bond.

Up to now, Bond has been playing his part well, watching and evaluating the team's responses to the test - but sitting across from him in the departure lounge is a man that 007 has just recognised from a recent top secret briefing as Iain Halloran, a former IRA terrorist wanted for a series of brutal bombings in mainland Europe. To make things worse, the PCs are aware of none of this, because the briefing has not yet been made available to them. Bond realises that it's a colossal stroke of luck to cross paths with this killer, and if the terrorist gets on to a plane, this rare opportunity to catch him will be lost. Breaking cover, he orders the PCs to help him capture the bomber.

For the PCs, this is a big problem; none of them have met Bond, yet they all know him by reputation and 'Kontarsky' is certainly similar in build to 007 but their briefing stresses the intelligence and skill of the KGB agent they are escorting. Is this man who he claims to be, or a clever spy trying to fool them? To make things worse, there's no time to contact SIS HQ to verify Bond/Kontarsky's story, and Halloran is getting up from his seat and walking towards the departure gate.

If the PCs stall too long or absolutely refuse to believe Bond, he will resume the Kontarsky persona and sheepishly admit he was faking it - then at the first opportunity he'll use his full skills to break away from the PCs (trying his best not to hurt them too much) and go after Halloran, bluffing his way on to the commuter jet bound for Dublin.

Halloran is armed with a ceramic pistol that will go undiscovered by the airport metal detectors, and he has four more henchmen with similar weapons already waiting on the plane; he intends to fly to Dublin before driving out to a remote country farmhouse for a meeting with some of his old IRA associates. Bond will board the plane, follow Halloran to the farmhouse and then attempt to take out the terrorists - it's only the PCs who will put a snag in his plans.

Depending on how the PCs react, the scenario will play out in a number of ways;

If they stop the Dublin-bound jet from taking off, a firefight will ensue and Halloran will attempt to escape across the airport, steal a car and get away.

If they board the plane and attempt to take control or cause a situation in the air, Halloran and his men will hijack the plane and force it to land at a small airstrip on the Irish mainland, then make their escape. This could also lead to a mid-air firefight, remembering that the PCs still have their under-powered weapons.

If they assist Bond, they will go with him to the farmhouse and join in on the attack. In the latter case, their will be two terrorists for each PC in addition to 007. Again, this will be a tricky confrontation with reduced weapons and no back-up.

Player rewards should be based on their success or failure at dealing with the fake KGB agents, capturing Iain Halloran, or capturing Halloran and his associates at the farmhouse. In addition, depending on their attitude towards him and their general performance as SIS operatives, the PCs may make a friend at British Intelligence in the form of 007 himself, who may just keep tabs on their continued performance.

As noted above, speed is the key to running **Shell Game** - part of the fun of the scenario is having 007 make a guest appearance, but it's also about keeping your players unbalanced and maintaining that slight doubt in their mind about Bond/Kontarsky's identity. And if you're feeling really sneaky, a referee might also consider inverting the plotline - what if it isn't a test? What is Kontarsky is actually Kontarsky?